

# THE ADVENTURE OF THE MUSGRAVE RITUAL

BY SIR A. CONAN DOYLE.

AN ANOMALY which often struck me in the character of my friend Sherlock Holmes was that, although in his methods of thought he was the nearest and most methodical of mankind, and although also he affected a certain quiet primness of dress, he was none the less in his personal habits one of the most untidy men that ever drove a fellow-lodger to distraction. Not that I am in the least conventional in that respect myself. The rough-and-tumble work of Afghanistan, coming on the top of a natural benevolence of disposition, has made me rather more lax than befits a medical man. But with me there is a limit, and when I find a man who keeps his dining-room in the coal-scuttle, his tobacco in the toe-end of a Persian slipper, and his unanswerable correspondence transcribed by a jack-knife in the very center of his wooden mantelpiece, then I begin to give myself virtuous airs. I have always held, too, that pistol practice should be distinguished from pastime; and when Holmes, in one of his queer humors, would sit in an arm-chair with his hair-trigger and a bumper of Bozcar cartridges and proceed to adorn the opposite wall with a patriotic V. R. done in bullet-pocks, I felt very strongly that neither the atmosphere nor the appearance of our room was improved by it.

Our chambers were always full of chemicals and of criminal records, which had a way of wandering into unlikely positions, and of turning up in the butter-dish or in even less desirable places. But his papers were my great curiosity. He had a horror of destroying documents, especially those which were connected with his past cases, and yet it was only once in every year or two that he would muster energy to docket and arrange them; for, as I have mentioned somewhere in these incoherent memoirs, the outbursts of passionate energy which he performed in the most remarkable feats with which his name is associated were followed by reactions of lethargy during which he would lie about with his violin and his books, hardly moving save from the sofa to the table. Thus month after month his papers accumulated, until every corner of the room was stocked with documents of manuscript which were on no account to be burned, and which could not be put away save by their owner. One winter's night, as we were sitting together by the fire, I ventured to suggest to him that, as he had finished pasting extracts into his common-place book, he might as well destroy the rest by making our room a little more habitable. He could not deny the justice of my request, so with a rather rueful face he returned to his bedroom, from which he returned presently pulling a large tin box behind him. This he placed in the middle of the floor, and, squatting down, he stood in front of it, he threw back the lid. I could see that it was already a third full of bundles of papers tied up with red tape into separate packages.

"There are cases enough here, Watson," said he, looking at me with mischievous eyes. "I have seen all that I had in this box you would ask me to pull some out instead of putting others in."

"These are the records of your early work, then?" "I have often wished that I had notes of those cases." "Yes, my boy, these were all done prematurely, but they are of some value to glorify me. He lifted the bundle after bundle in a tender, caressing sort of way. "They are not all successes, Watson," said he, but there are some pretty little ones among them. Here's the record of the Tarleton murders, and the case of Vaberron, the wine merchant, and the case of the old Russian woman, and the singular affair of the aluminum crutch, as well as a full account of Riccetti of the club-foot, and his abominable habit of carrying a ball of string attached to it, and three rusty old disks of metal."

"He dived his arm down to the bottom of the chest, and brought out a wooden wicker chair, a sliding lid, such as children's toys are kept in. From within he produced a crumpled piece of paper, an old-fashioned book, and a small tin box, which he threw at my feet. "Well, my boy, what do you make of this lot?" he asked, smiling at my expression.

"It is a curious collection." "Very curious, and the story that hangs about it is a story as being more curious still."

"These relics have a history, then?" "So much so that they are history."

"What do you mean by that?" "Sherlock Holmes picked them up one by one, and laid them along the edge of the table. Then he re-seated himself in his chair and looked them over with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

"These," said he, "are all that I have left to remind me of the adventure of the Musgrave Ritual."

I heard him mention the case more than once, though I had never been able to gather the details. "I should be so glad," said I, "if you would give me an account of it."

"And leave the litter as it is?" he cried, mischievously. "Your tidiness soon hear much more of a story, Watson. But I should be glad that you should add this case to your annals, for there are points in it which make it quite unique in the annals of the law. A collection of my trifling achievements would certainly be incomplete which contained no account of this very singular business."

"You may remember how the affair of the Gloria Scott, and my conversation with the woman who was called Watson, I told you of, first turned my attention in the direction of the profession which has become my life's work. You see me now when my name has become known far and wide, and when I am generally recognized both by the public and by the official force as being a final court of appeal in doubtful cases. Even when I was first called to the time of the affair which you have commemorated in 'A Study in Scarlet,' I had already established a considerable reputation. Now and again cases came in my way, principally through the introduction of old fellow-students, for during my last years at the university there was a good deal of talk there about myself and my methods. The third of these cases was that of the Musgrave Ritual, and it is to the interest which was aroused by that singular chain of events, and the large issues which proved to be at stake, that I trace my first stride toward the position which I now hold."

"Reginald Musgrave had been in the same college as myself, and I had some slight acquaintance with him. He was not generally popular among

the undergraduates, though it always seemed to me that what was set down as pride was really an attempt to cover extreme natural diffidence. In appearance he was a man of an exceedingly aristocratic type, thin, high-nosed and large-eyed, with languid and yet courtly manners. He was indeed a son of one of the very oldest families in the kingdom, though his branch was a cadet one which had separated from the Northern Musgraves some time in the 16th century, and had established itself in Western Sussex, where the Manor House of Hurlstone, perhaps the oldest inhabited building in the county, something of his birth-place seemed to cling to the man, and I never looked at his pale, keen face or the polish of his head without associating him with gray archways and mullioned windows and all the venerable wreckage of a feudal keep. Once or twice we drifted into talk, and I

to drive it from our minds, and it was prefaced by the disgrace and dismissal of Butler Brunton.

"This," he said, "it came about, I have said that the man was intelligently and this very intelligence has caused his ruin, for it seems to have led to an insatiable curiosity about things which I did not in the least concern him. I had no idea of the lengths to which this would carry him, until the merest accident opened my eyes to it."

"I have said that the house is a rambling one. One day last week, on Thursday night, to be more exact, I found that I could not sleep, having foolishly taken a cup of strong coffee after my dinner. After struggling against it until 2 in the morning, I felt that it was quite hopeless, so I rose and lit the candle with the intention of continuing a novel which I was reading. The book, however, had

been left in the billiard-room, so I pulled on my dressing-gown and started off to get it.

"In order to reach the billiard-room I had to descend a flight of stairs and then to cross the head of a passage which led to the library and the gun-room. You can imagine my surprise when, as I looked down this corridor, I saw a glimmer of light coming from the open door of the library. I had myself extinguished the lamp and closed the door before coming to bed. Naturally my first thought was of burglars. The corridor at Hurlstone has their walls largely decorated with trophies of old weapons. From one of these I plucked a battle-axe, and then, as I was fully dressed, I crept on tiptoe down the passage and peeped in at the open door.

"Brunton, the butler, was in the library. He was sitting, fully dressed in an easy chair with a slip of paper which looked like a map upon his knee, and his forehead sunk forward upon his hand in deep thought. I stood with my astonishment watching him from the darkness. A small taper on the edge of the table shed a feeble light which sufficed to show me that he was fully dressed. Suddenly, as I looked, he rose from his chair, and walking over to a bureau at the side, he unlocked it and drew out one of the drawers. From this he took a paper, and returning to his seat he flattened it out beside the taper on the edge of the table, and began to study it with minute attention. My indignation at this calm examination of our family documents overcame me so far that I took a step forward, and Brunton, looking up, saw me staring in the doorway. He sprang to his feet, his face turned livid with fear, and he thrust into his breast the chart-like paper which he had been originally studying."

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"Mr. Musgrave, sir," he cried, in a voice which was very low and very earnest, "I have been proud above my station in life, and disgrace would kill me. My blood is Welsh blood, and I will not, if I can, be driven to despair. If you cannot keep me after what has passed, then for God's sake let me give you notice and leave in a month, as if of my own free will. I could stand that. Mr. Musgrave, but not to be cast out before all the folk that I know so well."

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"For two days after this Brunton was most assiduous in his attention to his duties. I made no allusion to what had passed, and waited with some curiosity to see how he would cover his disgrace. On the third morning, however, he did not appear, as was his custom, after breakfast to receive my instructions for the day. As I left the dining-room I happened to have told you that she had only recently recovered from an illness, and was looking so wretchedly pale and wan that I remonstrated with his conduct. He said, 'You should be in bed,' I said. 'Come back to your duties when you are stronger.' He looked at me with so strange an expression that I began to suspect that his brain was affected. Mr. Musgrave said to me, 'I am strong enough, Mr. Musgrave. I will see what the doctor says.' I answered, 'You must stop work now, and when you go downstairs just say that I wish you to meet Rachel in the garden behind the house.' 'Gone! Gone where!'

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"For two days after this Brunton was most assiduous in his attention to his duties. I made no allusion to what had passed, and waited with some curiosity to see how he would cover his disgrace. On the third morning, however, he did not appear, as was his custom, after breakfast to receive my instructions for the day. As I left the dining-room I happened to have told you that she had only recently recovered from an illness, and was looking so wretchedly pale and wan that I remonstrated with his conduct. He said, 'You should be in bed,' I said. 'Come back to your duties when you are stronger.' He looked at me with so strange an expression that I began to suspect that his brain was affected. Mr. Musgrave said to me, 'I am strong enough, Mr. Musgrave. I will see what the doctor says.' I answered, 'You must stop work now, and when you go downstairs just say that I wish you to meet Rachel in the garden behind the house.' 'Gone! Gone where!'

"He is not in his room. Oh, yes, he is. He is in the garden. He fell back against the wall with shriek after shriek of laughter, while I, horrified at this sudden, hysterical attack, rushed to the door to see what was the matter. He was taken to her room, still screaming and sobbing, while I made inquiries about Brunton. There was no doubt about it that he had been sleeping in his bed, but no one since he had retired to his room the night before, and yet it was clear that he had been in the house, for his boots were found to be fastened in the morning. His clothes, his watch, and even his money were in his room, but his boots were usually worn, and were gone, but his boots were left behind. Where then could he have been? On the night before, and what could have become of him now?"

"Of course, we searched the house from cellar to garret, but it can be said, as I looked down this corridor, I saw a glimmer of light coming from the open door of the library. I had myself extinguished the lamp and closed the door before coming to bed. Naturally my first thought was of burglars. The corridor at Hurlstone has their walls largely decorated with trophies of old weapons. From one of these I plucked a battle-axe, and then, as I was fully dressed, I crept on tiptoe down the passage and peeped in at the open door. Brunton, the butler, was in the library. He was sitting, fully dressed in an easy chair with a slip of paper which looked like a map upon his knee, and his forehead sunk forward upon his hand in deep thought. I stood with my astonishment watching him from the darkness. A small taper on the edge of the table shed a feeble light which sufficed to show me that he was fully dressed. Suddenly, as I looked, he rose from his chair, and walking over to a bureau at the side, he unlocked it and drew out one of the drawers. From this he took a paper, and returning to his seat he flattened it out beside the taper on the edge of the table, and began to study it with minute attention. My indignation at this calm examination of our family documents overcame me so far that I took a step forward, and Brunton, looking up, saw me staring in the doorway. He sprang to his feet, his face turned livid with fear, and he thrust into his breast the chart-like paper which he had been originally studying."

"This is how you repay the trust which we have reposed in you. You will leave my service tomorrow."

"He bowed with the look of a man who is utterly crushed, and slunk past me without a word. The taper was still on the table, and by its light I glanced to see what the paper was which Brunton had taken from the bureau. To my surprise it was nothing of any importance at all, but simply a copy of the questions and answers of the singular old observance called the Musgrave Ritual. It is a sort of ceremony peculiar to our family, which each Musgrave for centuries past has gone through on his coming of age—something of private interest, and perhaps of some little importance to the archaeologist, like our own blazonings and crests, but of no practical use whatever."

"We had better come back to the paper afterwards," said I. "If you think it really necessary," he answered, with some hesitation. "To continue my statement, however: I re-locked the bureau, using the key which Brunton had left, and I had turned to go when I was surprised to find that the singular old observance was standing before me."

"Mr. Musgrave, sir," he cried, in a voice which was very low and very earnest, "I have been proud above my station in life, and disgrace would kill me. My blood is Welsh blood, and I will not, if I can, be driven to despair. If you cannot keep me after what has passed, then for God's sake let me give you notice and leave in a month, as if of my own free will. I could stand that. Mr. Musgrave, but not to be cast out before all the folk that I know so well."

"You don't deserve much consideration, Brunton," I answered. "Your conduct has been most infamous. However, as you have been a long time in the family, I have no wish to bring disgrace upon you. A month, however, is too long. Take yourself away in a

week, and give what reason you like for going."

"Only a week, sir?" he cried, in a despairing voice. "A fortnight—say at least a fortnight!"

"A week," I repeated, "and you may consider yourself to have been very leniently dealt with."

"He crept away, his face sunk upon his breast, like a broken man. I while I put out the light and returned to my room.

"For two days after this Brunton was most assiduous in his attention to his duties. I made no allusion to what had passed, and waited with some curiosity to see how he would cover his disgrace. On the third morning, however, he did not appear, as was his custom, after breakfast to receive my instructions for the day. As I left the dining-room I happened to have told you that she had only recently recovered from an illness, and was looking so wretchedly pale and wan that I remonstrated with his conduct. He said, 'You should be in bed,' I said. 'Come back to your duties when you are stronger.' He looked at me with so strange an expression that I began to suspect that his brain was affected. Mr. Musgrave said to me, 'I am strong enough, Mr. Musgrave. I will see what the doctor says.' I answered, 'You must stop work now, and when you go downstairs just say that I wish you to meet Rachel in the garden behind the house.' 'Gone! Gone where!'